India needs to dump US framework on Muslims

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Summary

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The US-run world order has been in the process of a reset since 2020. The post-WWII dynamic that existed for over seven decades, is changing; the glimpses of some of the upcoming challenges in the new world have already been revealed through a curtain raiser and many of the conflicts borne out of the old world order are coming to a climax.

In the last four years, Covid claimed around 7 million lives; Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan cost around 7000 deaths; Russia-Ukraine war led to the killings of over 100,000 people; and the Israel-Hamas war has killed 15,000 people so far. Not only are new paradigms of new warfare being established but old conflicts are redrawing boundaries as the US supremacy is adjusting to a multipolar world.

India stands out as the only country, which preemptively reset its calculus on a protracted conflict with Pakistan—in 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government reorganised the state of Jammu & Kashmir, nullifying Articles 370 and 35A and thus removing all constitutional, ideological and psychological ambiguities which had resulted in the conflict in the first place.

Even as the Modi government is the only dispensation in the world which has resolved a major conflict in the Muslim majority Kashmir, without a war or any bloodshed, it still seems to be seeking validation from global powers.

This is absurd, especially if one takes note of the heavy casualties of Muslims in the ongoing war in Gaza. Though there is no comparison between Kashmir and Gaza, but if one were to still evaluate the two from a Muslim conflict perspective, it is clear that the Indian policy tool deployed on August 5, 2019, was a fundamental departure from how the West has dealt with Islamist insurgencies in the world.

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Since the WWII, the US has been running with the hare and hunting with the hounds in the Middle East, to maintain its global preeminence and supremacy. It nurtured the most radical Islamists to wrest control of the world from the Soviet Union, only to later find itself drained economically by endless wars by the same extremist jihadists in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, etc. While it ran its geopolitical machinations in the Muslim world, at home, the West attempted to salvage its guilty conscience and soft power by opening doors to reckless immigration from Muslim nations and iconising Muslim chauvinists like Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib and their ilk. To justify its dichotomous and schizophrenic policy, the US devised more polarising narratives—critical race theory, Islamophobia, dismantling Hindutva— giving birth to a huge Woke generation that has come to hate everything about the Western civilisation including its accomplishments.

As a result, today, the American social fabric is ruptured along racial, religious, and steep ideological lines. The fissure is so deep that today Americans worry about the looming civil war and partitioning of the country while the US struggles with insurmountable debt and tough competition from China. So, even as the Western Military Industrial Complex and security elite earned extortionate profits from third-world conflicts but the US hard power and soft power have paid a price, leading to the decline of the American supremacy.

In the ongoing war in Gaza, the USA's closest ally and strategic partner, Israel is inviting widespread condemnation not only in the Muslim world but also in the Western world, for its military response to Hamas' provocative and barbaric terror attack against 1400

innocent Israeli civilians. The killings and displacement of thousands of Palestinian Muslims in Gaza is evoking protests in the West and cries for declaring Israeli action as ‘war crimes’ and ‘genocide’ of Muslims.

From the perspective of Muslims who have been following all the conflicts involving Muslims, it should be evident that the Modi government chose the most benign approach to resolve its own Muslim conflict. If any Muslim in India or abroad, acknowledges the obvious and appreciates India’s approach, it is no favour to the Modi government. But it seems, the government is either suffering from inferiority complex or remains desperate for validation and confused about its approach in Kashmir, going forward.

That is why, after taking such a monumental step on August 5, 2019, the Modi government did not completely wipe the old political slate in Kashmir. Instead, it honoured the same political players who were instrumental in fomenting and perpetuating the conflict. The soft separatists and full-fledged separatists—Abdullahs, Muftis, Mirwaiz Umar, Shah Faesal, Shehla Rashid et al., have been accommodated back into the political fold. There has been no legal or political penalty accrued to them whatsoever, for fuelling Islamist radicalism, violence and terrorism that killed over 50,000 people and displaced 300,000 Kashmiri Hindus.

Instead, there has been iconization of the IAS-turned-politician- turned-Muslim separatist-turned Modi fan— Shah Faesal and Leftist activist-turned-politician-turned-Muslim separatist-turned-Modi fan—Shehla Rashid. Both projected themselves as voices of Kashmir, mobilising Muslim youth to come to the streets to fight against the Indian state and overthrowing its writ. Shah Faesal was detained at the airport while he was attempting to flee the country, was reinstated in the Indian civil services and now holds a plum post in the central government. Shehla Rashid went scot-free too and is now likely to enjoy professorship in a prestigious university. Ever since, both have been enjoying mainstream media hype and social media limelight as great “reformists” and “moderate” Muslims who have seen the light at the end of the tunnel.

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This is no different from the policy of the yesteryears—Islamist separatist Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Shabir Shah, Yasin Malik et al., who enjoyed podium at mainstream media conclaves in New Delhi, after wreaking havoc in Kashmir. In effect, this is former RAW chief AS Dulat’s, Dulat doctrine redux and reenacted under the guidance of National Security Advisor Ajit Doval. But more importantly, it is the doctrinal paralysis that both the Left and the Right wing political parties in India have been afflicted with for the last 35 years.

This confusion has kept the conflict in Kashmir alive, with each government going round the circles empowering the most negative elements of the Muslim society with an undefined objective. This approach, an emulation of the US approach, has only benefitted the security elite in India, exactly the way it did in the West. While the US still got away

with its excesses in the world, India lost its territorial, political and psychological control in Kashmir, lost its narrative at international fora and at home among many sections of society and wasted massive resources in Kashmir for 30 years. Though India grew economically, but in comparison, China, took off dramatically and caught up with the US in the same period.

India is not the United States of America. Even to say this, would be to state the obvious. Indian objectives are radically different from those of the US or Israel. Therefore, our approach to internal and external conflicts, can't be the US or Israeli template. Especially, when the new India, in the last 10 years, has demonstrated that it has the potential to set its own course and lead by example. Thousands of young Indians have excelled in all fields both at home and abroad. They are certainly capable of formulating newer solutions to older political and social problems but the old hacks in the Indian system refuse to pave way for new thinking.

The old guard of India's political class, is frozen in time and ideas. Both the Left and the Right wing parties in India seem to think that the American formula has helped them to polarise the electorate and earn their respective vote banks. It certainly has been useful but they don't seem to comprehend how the US framework has destroyed the entire Western civilisation.

Also, increasingly the Hindu-Muslim polarisation, is finding very little attraction among many sections of the Hindu electorate in India. On the other hand, Muslim electorate is consolidating around its religious identity across the country. Calcification of Muslim religious identity in India, is deeply problematic given the fact that the Indian subcontinent partitioned in 1947 precisely after experiencing a similar phenomenon in the 1930s and 40s.

It is true that a large section of Muslims in India are conservative, orthodox and prone to favoring the Islamist narrative. But when the state iconises and idolises Muslim separatist voices or regressive elements, either by way of political appeasement or policy paralysis, it is only facilitating the undermining of its own writ and authority. On August 5, 2019, it seemed that one leader in the 75 years of Indian Republic's existence—Prime Minister Narendra Modi—had finally seen through the fallacy of this approach and how the Dulat-Doval doctrine was inimical to the interests of India. Many steps taken by the Modi government, such as crackdown on terror funding, banning of terror groups, and opening up Jammu & Kashmir to the rest of India, corroborated that belief.

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But some of the actions, like turning villains of Kashmir into heroes, are subversive to say the least. No one is perfect, not even our greatest icons. However, on the whole, an icon has to be largely positive, and not someone whose moral compass is in the shades of

grey. The state should not confuse masses by converting criminals into heroes and vice versa. State and society can forgive violators and even accommodate them but not without their penance and reformation. When the state makes anti-hero, the hero, without any penalty imposed on them, it sets wrong examples for society. Indian society will only slide in darkness if there is no heavy cost attached to criminality. India is doomed if the Modi government fails to draw the red lines and chalk out its own formulation for future, independent of the Western formulations.

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